

International visitation to be a boon for county's economy

By Sean Doherty

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau is tasked with marketing Charlotte County to potential visitors throughout the year to help boost our local economy while supporting jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector. This influx of dollars into our community not only directly benefits our area's hospitality-related businesses, such as hotels, restaurants and attractions, but also significantly contributes to our county's tax revenue. These collections from our visitors, which come in the form of sales tax, gas tax, etc., help alleviate the individual tax liability of each and every Charlotte County resident. In fact, due to visitor expenditures at the statewide level, tourism is the primary reason Florida is one of only eight states that does not levy a state income tax.

As we look ahead each year to coordinate our marketing plans, visitor tracking data is an important tool to help guide those efforts. One metric our research shows is where our visitors come from throughout the country and the world. In Fiscal Year 2022, for example, 30% of our visitors came from the Midwest states, 23% came from the Northeast section of the country and another 23% came from other areas of Florida. Only 7% of our visitors traveled from outside the United States which historically is typical. Of the approximately 7% share of international visitors we see each year, over half of them are from Canada primarily to escape the cold of the winter months. This leaves a lot of room for tourism to grow in the international sector.

As a result of tourism's recent successes, coupled with the anticipation of what Sunseeker Resort is expected to deliver, we recently took the step to join our fellow destination marketing organizations on the Southwest Florida coast in contracting with two international representation firms to assist us on a daily basis in our marketing efforts abroad. Until now, we were the only county between Hillsborough and Collier to not have international representation. Based on research and other information, it was a fairly obvious choice to select the United Kingdom and German markets to target initially. Visitors from both of these markets have demonstrated a strong affinity for many of the attractions and activities our destination has to offer such as kayaking, paddleboarding, fishing, eco tours and wildlife viewing, not to mention our miles of uncrowded beaches. In addition, tourists hailing from the UK and Germany, many of whom are sensitive to the environment and sustainability issues, tend to visit during the summer months when many of our hospitality businesses could desperately use the economic boost. They also are likely to stay longer and spend more money than a domestic visitor.

While our international marketing effort is still in its infancy, we've already made significant strides in just a few short months to improve the awareness of our destination to our friends abroad. To date, staff has met with dozens of tour operators and travel agents to educate them on our destination. In addition, we've played host to two travel journalists from the UK and have a visit scheduled for a German travel writer in December. As we continue down this path, we are excited about the potential results and look forward to seeing how these efforts will

positively impact the economy and jobs in our community. For information on the tourism offerings of our destination visit PureFlorida.com.

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